

Truckee Olympian relives race for hometown

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – It wasn't competing in the Olympics that stressed out Travis Ganong, it was the anxiety of being named to the U.S. team.

"It was stressful the whole season last year during World Cup leading up to the Olympics," the Truckee native told a crowd of supporters. "Once I made the team, I was relaxed and had fun."

The most fun was walking in during the Opening Ceremonies – seeing the crowd, being with the other athletes, all those flashbulbs going off. After that, it was all about work. After all, his event was the next day.

But he met his goal at the time – make it to the Olympics. He placed fifth in the downhill, four-tenths of a second from gold, seven-one hundredths from bronze.

"It was frustrating, but it gives me motivation," the 26-year-old said.



Olympian Travis Ganong returns home to Truckee on Oct. 14 to talk about skiing. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Dressed in a beanie with USA across the front, the speed skier enlightened the Truckee-Donner Chamber of Commerce breakfast attendees about the Olympics, his life and future goals.

In Russia he was not able to complete his final training run because his ski popped off near the top of the course. Ganong admits this may have helped save his legs.

While he has hit 100 mph on the racecourse, at the Olympics he was in the 80s.

A video of his Olympic race was shown for the group last week, with many oohs and aahs as he flew over huge jumps that at times had him in the air for hundreds of yards.

“That course was very challenging,” Ganong said, with turns and steeps that pushed the racers.

Ganong doesn't set seasonal goals, but instead he has more of a career vision. He hopes to keep racing at this caliber for another eight to 10 years. After that he plans to stay in the industry in some capacity. Taking courses in ski management at Sierra Nevada College will be in his future.

Winning the men's World Cup downhill title is the big dream. No U.S. man has done so. Daron Rahlves, who raced for Sugar Bowl, placed second. (Two U.S. women have won it – Tamara McKinney of Squaw Valley and Lindsay Vonn of Vail.)

This summer Ganong worked on his starts. He calls them his “Achilles' heel” and the one area he could have shaved time in Sochi earlier this year. Training in the giant slalom was another focus this summer. Much of the summer is spent in Chile and New Zealand preparing for the upcoming season.

While he still calls Truckee home, as do his parents, the ski season is primarily in Europe. This year is unusual with two events at Beaver Creek, Colo.

Ganong said with FIS (International Ski Federation) leaders

being European it's hard to generate interest in hosting World Cup events in the United States. Plus, he added, most U.S. resorts don't want to shut down the bulk of their mountain for these races. (Squaw will be hosting a World Cup skiercross race this season.)

He started with the U.S. Ski Team's developmental team at age 15 after learning how to ski at Squaw. There he participated in various levels of competition. For the last five years he has been on the World Cup circuit.

U.S. athletes have a harder time securing sponsorships. Then there are limits to how much of his clothing can be covered. For example, the FIS allows only one headgear sponsor and then dictates the size. Ganong is still looking to fill that spot.

One thing that has changed is the shape of skis. There is less of a side cut, more old school.

"With side cut, you get crazy pressure on your knees," Ganong said. "There are fewer injuries (now)."

After the Olympics, Ganong competed the next weekend – securing his first World Cup podium.

The first downhill World Cup race this season is in December in Lake Louise, Canada.